



# BLUE SKY

Therapeutic Riding & Respite

## **Rider/Client Handbook 2021**

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**Welcome to the Blue Sky Family,**

We are so happy our paths have crossed! We want you to know that you are valued and you are seen. Whether you are a client, or you are caring for a client you are important!

You will hear three words at Blue Sky a lot...**Safe, Happy and Healthy**. All three words are equally important and if one is missing then that means something is broken. Every rule, guideline, program, project or event is run through these three filters to ensure that the goal of providing a safe, happy and healthy therapeutic community for all is being carried out.

It is important to us that you are comfortable and feel at home while you are at Blue Sky. This place exists for you...the client, the parent, the sibling, the caregiver, the volunteer...every single person is of equal importance. This is a family, and that means that everyone has a place at the table.

We know the financial burden that therapies and programs can create. It is our goal to keep lessons, camps and programs as reasonable as possible for our families. We know that sometimes financial assistance is needed, and we try very hard to help where needed. We simply ask that each family does the very best that they can, and if assistance is needed we ask that you pitch in volunteering when needed.

Sometimes in a family there are miscommunications, misunderstandings, disagreements and differences of opinions. If any of these arise we ask that you first not jump to conclusions, and talk to the person you may not be seeing eye to eye. If this does not create a resolution then we ask that you please come to me or any one of our board members to help seek a solution. We want everyone to be heard!

We hope that you enjoy your time at Blue Sky! We are really happy you are here.

Sincerely,



Amy Gayhart  
Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding & Respite, Board President and Executive Director

## The Blue Sky Story

Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite was founded in 2010 by a group of people devoted to developing a comprehensive program to help those living with disabilities and their families. This includes, not only individuals with autism, physical, cognitive or emotional disabilities, but also their siblings, parents and caretakers. Blue Sky's therapeutic riding center has helped many special needs individuals gain confidence and improve motor skills, cognitive ability and gain valuable life skills. Blue Sky offers the opportunity for riders of all abilities, to ride and compete in special events. We are creating an environment to teach life skills, offer the ability to participate in events such as Special Olympics and offer referrals to community resources and assist and offer support and respite to all members of a family with special needs children and adults.

We know the value therapeutic horseback riding offers our clients, but at Blue Sky, we are also very aware of the critical need for quality opportunities and programming for special needs adults that reaches past the saddle. Blue Sky wants to be part of the solution, and that is the reason for PURPOSE. During our PURPOSE program our partners (clients) participate in PURPOSE Mercantile, PURPOSE Produce and Barn Management. We use these three facets to teach job, social and life skills in a fun and supportive community. Also, our partners work towards employment in our very own PURPOSE Mercantile.

We want Blue Sky to become a place of respite, strength and resources for families living the day-to-day challenges of raising a special needs child, or caring for a family member into adulthood. Our goal is to serve this growing need in our community with these programs at minimal cost to our families. In addition, we will look to positive and proactive fundraising events and donations to help this community resource continue to expand and serve a vital need.

We value the dedication, love and countless hours of work our founder, Julie Coady, put in to making this organization what it is today. She is forever our founder and forever our friend.

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### Our Mission:

To provide a safe, happy and healthy therapeutic community that works to empower and propel our special needs citizens and their families to their fullest potential. We serve our valued clients by providing therapeutic horseback riding, respite, vocational training and entrepreneurial opportunities.

### Our Vision:

- **Horses**  
To grow our therapeutic horsemanship program not only in the number of instructors but also in our level of certification and quality of facilities which will allow us to serve a larger portion of our special needs community and our current riders at the highest level.
- **Hope**  
By providing our citizens and their families with hope and security for their future, it will allow them the opportunity to flourish and find their voice they so dearly deserve.

### Our Values:

**Safe**

**Happy**

**Healthy**

## **Our Programs**

2 programs working towards 1 goal, a safe, happy, healthy community for all abilities.

1. Therapeutic Horseback Riding & Driving
2. PURPOSE Program - Day Program and PURPOSE Mercantile

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## **Texas State Equine Liability Law**

UNDER TEXAS LAW (CHAPTER 87, CIVIL PRACTICE AND REMEDIES CODE), AN EQUINE PROFESSIONAL IS NOT LIABLE FOR AN INJURY TO OR THE DEATH OF A PARTICIPANT IN EQUINE ACTIVITIES RESULTING FROM THE INHERENT RISKS OF EQUINE ACTIVITIES.

For more information, please visit <https://guides.sll.texas.gov/animal-law/livestock>

## **Non-Discrimination Policy**

Blue Sky provides equal employment opportunity to all employees and applicants regardless of a person's race, religion, color, sex, age, national origin, disability, veteran status, or any other legally protected status. Employees with disabilities should inform the Administrative Director of their need and will be provided with reasonable accommodations.

Harrasment or discrimination of any kind is not tolerated, including behavior, comments, jokes, slurs, e-mail messages, pictures, photographs, or other conduct that contributes to an intimidating or offensive environment. Harrasment and discrimination includes conduct based on race, color, religion, age, sex, pregnancy, physical or mental disability, national origin, ancestry, medical condition, veteran status, marital status, sexual orientation, gender identity, genetic information, or any other non-job-related factor.

## **Eligibility Criteria**

Clients vary in ages from 5 to 65 years old with a variety of diagnosis from Autism to PTSD. Clients range from highly functioning, in need of safe social interaction, to those who will need full-time care for the rest of their lives. Some have regulatory challenges and are prone to behaviors and outbursts. At Blue Sky, we understand that it is difficult for their families to find full day programs that stimulate, engage, and provide a feeling of community. Our goal is to be that community and safe space for every child and adult we serve. Upon enrollment into our program, we will have a consultation with the family to learn how we can best serve you.

## Client Program Fees

- Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding & Respite is a non-profit organization. We raise funds in a variety of ways to help reduce the cost of programs to our participants. **The suggested lesson fee for therapeutic horseback riding or driving is \$40 per lesson.** This amount only covers about 30% of the actual cost to run one lesson. Scholarships are made available by application and consultation. Blue Sky makes it a priority to never turn away a client due to inability to pay. Scholarship families can help offset scholarship costs through volunteerism and assisting with fundraisers.
- **Blue Sky Riding Lesson payments are paperless.**
  - You can pay online on the [www.blueskytexas.org](http://www.blueskytexas.org) website under the Client Payments tab.
  - If your family cannot use the online payment method as an option, then form of payment must be via Check. The check can be made out to Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite.
  - Blue Sky Riding Instructors do not take cash for payment.
- **Our Tuesday/Thursday program runs from 9:00-2:00 and costs \$25/day.** There are currently no scholarships available for our PURPOSE program.
- **Our Friday PURPOSE program runs from 10:00-1:00 and is free to all who wish to attend.**

## Attire

Clients in our therapeutic riding & driving program should dress appropriately for the weather, and in clothing that does not restrict movement or vision. Appropriate trousers/pants for horseback riding include jeans, riding breeches, sweat pants, or leggings. All riders must wear protective footwear; a leather boot is recommended or another closed-toed shoe that will not hold sand from the arena. Parents/Guardians, family, and caretakers who wish to participate in the riders lesson must also wear protective footwear.

### Please respect the following guidelines:

- No open toed shoes of any style
- No dangling jewelry
- No perfume (attracts bugs/some participants may have allergies)
- Modest shorts are permitted but not recommended due to biting insects
- No obscene logos

Please keep in mind that BSTR&R is a professional organization and may often have unannounced visits or media opportunities. Please dress comfortably yet sensibly.

Clients in the PURPOSE program must also be ready to spend time out of the farm, so closed toe shoes are a must. Also, be prepared with appropriate clothing due to changing weather conditions.

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## Safety Rules

Safety for our participants, volunteers, staff and visitors are of the utmost concern. BSTR&R horses are incredibly trained to work with many distractions, however they are still animals with a strong flight instinct. Working around horses is a risk activity. Staff and volunteers review and practice safety and emergency procedures on a regular basis.

### **To ensure the safety of everyone:**

- All clients must wear a helmet at all times when around the horses. Closed toed shoes are required for all persons (including parents and observers) near horses.
- Get approval and assistance of the onsite instructor or staff member to enter animal enclosures
- Keep food stored and safely hid to ensure clients with food issues avoid triggers
- Respect the privacy of client private lesson times by keeping a safe distance away, and give an appropriate amount of time after the previous client has finished their lesson before entering the barn. Client's lessons continue even while in the barn, and it is respectful to give that client their full time.
- Only essential personnel can be in the mounting area during the mount. All other persons should be clear of the area. The instructor will decide which persons need to be included in the mounting/dismounting process.
- Keep the work area clean and free of tripping obstacles.
- Only one rider at a time on the mounting ramp. Other riders should wait in the designated viewing area until called to mount their horse.
- All spectators should be in the designated viewing areas for viewing lessons. These areas include, but are not necessarily limited to, the arena patio, the Purpose Room, and the shaded picnic area. When viewing from outside the Arena, please do not stand, jump, or pull on the fence. It can break with enough force and create safety hazards.
- No running, loud outbursts, throwing rocks, or other behavior that may startle a horse.
- No Smoking, use of tobacco, or e-cigarettes anywhere on the property
- All minors must be supervised. No running, pushing, yelling, climbing the rails, stairs or ramp.
- Driveway speed limit is posted at 10 mph. This speed limit is strictly enforced.
- Keep dogs leashed at all times and away from riding arena, tacking and mounting areas. If a dog barks or is aggressive in any way we ask that you please leave your animal at home. This is for the safety of all clients, staff and volunteers. Aggressive dogs could possibly spook the horses.
- Visitors are always welcome during business hours in the observation area of the facility. If visitors would like more information about BSTR&R or a tour of the entire facility, please arrange this with an Instructor or staff member in advance of your visit. You are responsible for your guests.
- The barn is a busy place during lesson times. For your safety and the safety of others, please do not congregate in the barn, in front of the barn, or in the pathway leading from the barn to the grooming, tacking, and mounting area. These areas need to remain clear for staff and horses. Only staff and trained volunteers are allowed in the barn, paddocks, and arena.
- Blue Sky is committed to welcoming clients of all abilities and that does include some clients with behaviors. If there is ever an emergency and you are asked to vacate the area, please report to the safety area (underneath the trees) on the west side of the Blue Sky gate. The gate will be closed for the client's safety. We ask that you remain on the west side of the gate until the situation has deescalated. An appointed volunteer, staff member or instructor will let you know when it is appropriate to enter the Blue Sky gate. Although we try our hardest to keep these situations from happening...the fact is they do happen. We ask that you have patience and respect for the client who is having a hard time, and their family.

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### **Code of Conduct**

Thoughtful conduct and self-control factor into the safety and enjoyment of all participants. All persons at BSTR&R will be expected to adhere to the following code of conduct.

**Respect for facility:** no inappropriate use of the facilities, mailing lists or monies.

**Respect for others:** no disruptive or abusive behavior to the animals or people at BSTR&R.

**Respect for the organization's rules, policies and procedures:** Families are expected to conduct themselves in a cooperative and appropriate manner at all times. Examples of inappropriate behavior include: any form of harassment, aggressive or abusive behavior to self or others, including horses. Please notify staff immediately if you are subject to any inappropriate behavior. Individuals exhibiting inappropriate behavior will be requested to leave the property immediately and additional assistance may be called if deemed needed. Inappropriate behavior may result in dismissal from the program. Please notify staff immediately of any concerns regarding the behavior of program horses such as biting, kicking, etc

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## Confidentiality Statement

Any information in regards to the participants of Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite including: participants, volunteers, and personnel shall remain privileged and confidential. This information may include but is not limited to any medical, social, personal, and/or financial information. Information concerning riders will be shared with volunteers on a need to know basis. Disclosure of any confidential information shall not be released to anyone not associated with BSTR&R. Volunteers must seek staff permission prior to taking any videos or photos.

## Participant Illness

Participants are not permitted to take part in classes if they have:

- Nausea, vomiting and/or diarrhea within the past 24 hours.
- Severe persistent coughing or a severe cold.
- An oral temperature of 100 degrees or higher. Temperature should be stable for 24 hours before attending class.
- A contagious or exposed skin rash.
- Red, watery, burning eyes with either white or yellow drainage.
- A communicable disease such as head lice, strep throat, chickenpox, etc.

## Proactive COVID-19 Prevention Response Statement

In early 2020, COVID-19 took the world by surprise and dramatically affected the lives of our Blue Sky community. The coronavirus pandemic forced us to evaluate our practices and make appropriate changes in order to protect our community and our ability to serve our community. According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC), outdoor activities remain one of the safest choices when spending time with people. At Blue Sky, we are committed to following CDC recommendations for COVID-19, and in order for us to continue to service our community, it is a necessity that our clients and families are equally as committed.

When Arriving to Blue Sky for your Scheduled Lesson:

- Please do not arrive more than 5 minutes early if possible. There is likely another lesson ending as you arrive and it is a courtesy to allow that family to finish up their time uninterrupted. Many families may also be in Quarantine and it is for their safety as well as yours to remain separate from them.
- Please remain in the car until an instructor or volunteer has completed your **Health Safety Check** and **Temperature Check**. If the rider or caregiver presents a fever, that lesson will not be held for the safety of the rider, the family members/caregivers, volunteers present, instructor, and all other families those individuals interact with.

We ask that all riders and family members present wear a mask when possible. While the rider is up on the horse, they may remove their mask. Any staff and volunteers within 6 feet of distance will keep their mask on. If they are farther than 6 feet away from the client, volunteers are permitted to remove their mask.

When your lesson has ended, we ask that you immediately head toward your vehicle. It is likely that another rider and family will be arriving for the next scheduled lesson, and it is for safety and courtesy to them that your lesson ends timely and moments of possible interactions are prevented/limited as much as possible.

We politely ask and require that all staff, volunteers, clients, and families, follow these COVID-19 recommendations while on-site and/or receiving services at Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite (as reasonably and able):

- While outside, remaining at least 6 feet apart in distance from a non-relative. When outside and 6 feet apart, masks are allowed to be worn down. If you can't stay at least 6 feet from people who don't live with you, wear a mask.
- When inside, remain at least 6 feet apart wearing a mask
- When wearing a mask, wear it correctly and consistently
- Avoid crowding on property; this most notably applies to the PURPOSE Room, patio spaces, and the Barn areas where people tend to congregate or work closely.
- Washing hands or using hand sanitizer when arriving to Blue Sky and before interacting with staff or volunteers.
- Comply with our standard Health Safety Check and Temperature Check
- If a member of your household is diagnosed with COVID-19, we ask that the rider takes a 2 week break from lessons for the safety of themselves and our staff and volunteers

Our staff instructor and all volunteers are strictly held to COVID-19 safety standards. Volunteers who are diagnosed with COVID-19 quarantine from Blue Sky for 2 weeks. In the event our Horse Program Director, Jennifer Mathis, is diagnosed with COVID-19, or a member of her household is diagnosed with COVID-19, lessons will be canceled for at least a 2 week period for quarantine and recovery. If more time is necessary, proper communication will follow.

Please know that Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite and their employees do not and will not tolerate discrimination towards any persons with a confirmed COVID-19 diagnosis. Any and all communication of confirmed diagnosis is held absolutely confidential. Blue Sky follows the CDC recommendations for Quarantine, but as soon as those persons are deemed healthy by a medical professional, it is our goal to bring those affected back into our services.

While out, Blue Sky can offer our Hooves and Hello service. This service consists of a Facetime, Google Duo, or Zoom meeting with the rider to take part in a virtual lesson, at no cost to the rider.

If there are ever any concerns regarding COVID-19 and/or practices for proactive prevention, please feel free to contact Jennifer Mathis, Horse Program Director, Amy Gayhart, Executive Director, or Olivia Distasio, Client Services Coordinator and Advocate.

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## **Attendance Policy**

### **Horse Program:**

Clients having regularly scheduled lesson times should give 24 hours notice for cancelling. Upon 3 cancellations without 24 hours notice, clients will be moved from a regularly scheduled lesson time to appointment only. Appointment only offerings will be given based upon schedule availability. If clients are frequently late to the scheduled lesson, an attempt to change their lesson time will be made, but if the schedule cannot accommodate right away, they will also be moved to by appointment scheduling until further notice.

**PURPOSE Program:**

- 3 no-shows without notice your child’s spot will be made available to a new client.
- 6 absences within a 6 month period (non-medical related) will also allow your spot to be filled by a new client.

Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

**Changing Your Lesson Time**

Blue Sky makes every effort to accommodate schedule changes when necessary, however an ideal time cannot be guaranteed. Parents or riders should contact Olivia Distasio, Client Services Coordinator and Advocate, as soon as a change is anticipated. Changes are processed based on the order they are received and the availability of open therapy sessions. Appointment only offerings will be given based upon schedule availability.

Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

**Lesson Cancellation Policy and Weather Policy**

While it is never ideal to cancel activities at Blue Sky, sometimes it may be necessary due to staff person illness, inclement weather, or site emergencies. Amy Gayhart, Executive Director at Blue Sky, reserves the right to cancel any PURPOSE activities due to illness, weather, or emergency. Jen Mathis, Horse Program Director, reserves the right to cancel scheduled lessons due to inclement and threatening weather, low staffing/staff illness, and site emergencies. The Board of Directors also reserves the right to cancel lessons due to site emergencies and threatening weather.

**Weather that threatens Blue Sky operations and is cause for canceling lessons is defined as:**

- **Heat:** Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite makes every effort to hold lessons. However, while riders are riding for 30 to 60 minutes at a time the horses and instructor are exposed to heat 3-6 hours per day.

We look at many factors, including temperature. If the “real feel” temperature is 90-100 degrees, the parent/guardian and instructor may decide that it is too hot. Instructors have the flexibility to cancel one lesson at a time; e.g. hold morning lessons, but cancel afternoon lessons as temperature rises.

Please note, in addition to the accuweather.com readings, we also check the temperature in the arena. If the temperature is over 100 degrees, lessons will be canceled.

- **Rain:** If there is light or intermittent rain lessons will continue. If there is thunder/lightning the arena and barn area must be cleared immediately. Do not wait under structure overhangs. There is metal in the barns. Go to your car. If there is no thunder for 30 continuous minutes, lessons may continue.
- **Cold Weather:** Blue Sky will cancel lessons if it is 45 degrees or below. If you have any questions please feel free to contact us.
- **Wind:** Lessons will be cancelled if there is a sustained wind of 15 miles per hour or if the National Weather Service issues a wind advisory.

- **Other:** For extreme weather conditions-floods tornadoes, etc. lessons are, of course cancelled. If you are unsure, call your instructor directly. Volunteers should also check with the instructor or Volunteer Coordinator if it is unclear.
- **PURPOSE:** If weather causes the PURPOSE program to be closed, you will be contacted by phone.

Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

### Communication

It is important that the client and their families inform Blue Sky staff of the best form of communication for schedule updates and events. If this is text, email or phone call, please indicate in the application form.

#### Blue Sky Contact Information

Blue Sky Phone Number: (469)-450-9594

- Jen Mathis: [jen@blueskytexas.org](mailto:jen@blueskytexas.org)
- Amy Gayhart: [amy@blueskytexas.org](mailto:amy@blueskytexas.org)
- Olivia Distasio: [olivia@blueskytexas.org](mailto:olivia@blueskytexas.org) / 469-600-983

#### Other ways you can keep in contact with Blue Sky include:

- **Electronic Newsletter-** The Blue Sky Newsletter is a great way to get updates and hear about amazing news in our community! The Newsletter is electronic and is sent via email.
- **Facebook and Instagram** - Please like BSTR&R on Facebook and Instagram for updates on the facility, rider progress, events, and more! Blue Sky can be followed at @blueskytherapeutic

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### Client Records

Riders, or their guardians, are required to update their registration information and Medical History Forms annually (per PATH International standards). All Rider forms must be updated every year. Medical History Forms must be signed by the riders Doctor or Medical Practitioner, or a renewal stating nothing has changed and the client may participate in equine therapy signed by their physician.. Equine activities cannot begin until this form is turned into the Horse Program Director. Riders are not permitted to ride without up-to-date forms.

Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

### Change of Health or Medication Status

Any change in riders health or medication status that could affect safety or health during equine activity must be updated on the riders Medical History Form and signed by their Doctor or Medical Practitioner. Failing to update riding instructors of a health or medication change could make the participant vulnerable to light to severe strain and minor/major injury. It is for safety that we ask to be updated.

Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

### Scheduled Closing

The Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite Yearly Calendar is updated on the website and is the best way to know what is going on and when at Blue Sky. Please visit [www.blueskytexas.org](http://www.blueskytexas.org)

## Grounds for Dismissal

- Attendance issues, such as frequent absences or chronic tardiness without notification
- Sharing private information about other clients
- Theft or other criminal behavior
- Sexual harassment and other discriminatory behavior
- Physical violence or threats against other clients, volunteers, employees and animals

## Program Withdrawal

Clients may withdraw from the program by notifying the Executive Director or Horse Program Director in writing.

Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

## Visitor Policy

Visitors are welcome to Blue Sky and must sign a waiver to come for a tour. Please consult the staff concerning the best time to visit Blue Sky. Visiting minors and children must be supervised by an adult at all times. Due to programming and scheduled lessons, it would be best for visitors to contact Blue Sky to set up an appointment for a meeting and a tour. Clients and families are welcome to bring visitors with them and give them tours of the property while they are at Blue Sky either for a lesson or to participate in PURPOSE and/or Fun Friday. Visitors must adhere to the same safety rules and dress code as our clients and families.

Initial: \_\_\_\_\_

## Volunteer Program Acknowledgement

Volunteers are our heart! Blue Sky couldn't do what we do unless our volunteers do what they do. From coaching, to feeding horses, to mowing the property, to helping in the garden...all of these are tasks done by a team of volunteers that are second to none. There is always room for help and we would love to have you a part of the Blue Sky family. Parents, Guardians, and Family are all encouraged to volunteer if you wish to do so. Volunteers should always be treated with the utmost respect and gratitude.

## Board of Directors

- **Amy Gayhart, President**  
[amy@blueskytexas.org](mailto:amy@blueskytexas.org)
- **Kristen Kromer, Secretary**  
[kristenkromer@gmail.com](mailto:kristenkromer@gmail.com)
- **Beverly Aten**  
[bevatn@gmail.com](mailto:bevatn@gmail.com)
- **Duane Sutton**  
[duane.sutton@screen-spe.com](mailto:duane.sutton@screen-spe.com)
- **Susan Pennau**  
[susanpennau@gmail.com](mailto:susanpennau@gmail.com)

- **Heather Beauchesne**  
[wingstoflyheather@gmail.com](mailto:wingstoflyheather@gmail.com)

- **Janet Bird**  
[costleigh@yahoo.com](mailto:costleigh@yahoo.com)

## Parent/Guardian Policy Acknowledgement and Acceptance Form

All rules, policies, and procedures have been reviewed and approved by the Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite Board of Directors.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Board of Directors Signature

**I understand and agree to follow all rules, policies, and procedures outlined in the Blue Sky Therapeutic Riding and Respite Parent/Guardian Handbook.**

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Horse Program Director Signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
Executive Director Signature